

Facilities and Enrollment

Study Committee



Committee Members

PTA Representative:	Sharon McAfee	AES
PTA Representative:	Tara Nelson	CES
School Council Representative:	Susan Vincent	AES
School Council Representative:	Patty Lowell	CES
Teacher Representative:	Becky Reese	AES
Teacher Representative:	Dee Vachon	CES
Principal:	Gail Korpusik	AES
Principal:	Peter Hoyt	CES
Assistant Superintendent:	David Jack	(Facilitator)

INTRODUCTION:

Last spring, the Amesbury School Committee in conjunction with the Superintendent of Schools identified a need to review current and long range enrollment patterns at the elementary school level. To that end, Dr. Chaurette initiated a formal independent study of long range enrollment projections. This study was conducted by the Merrimack Education Center (MEC) and consultant Dr. Arthur Wagman. This process was furthered by convening a committee made up of school community members to conduct their own research regarding the current state of the elementary level education in Amesbury, specific to enrollment, class size, and facility usage. This committee is called the Facilities and Enrollment Committee.

The Facilities and Enrollment Committee is comprised of eight members, four from each elementary school, plus Assistant Superintendent David Jack, as facilitator. The members were chosen by requesting each building principal select a representative from the PTA, School Council and a teacher, thus having representation from the teaching staff, administration and parents. Both elementary principals are members of this committee. The committee began meeting in January and continued through March.

The objective of the Facilities and Enrollment Committee was to look at the present and future needs of elementary school students in Amesbury. The task began with reviewing the data contained in the MEC study, as well as current enrollment and class size data, physical building size and capacity, and starting a dialogue for options. While this committee did look at the findings of the Long Range Enrollment Projection (LREP) in the MEC study, a significant amount of further research was conducted by this committee. The MEC findings were useful to the extent that it served notice that there is additional housing being built that might increase enrollment. However, as with all projections, the further out the projections were carried, the less accurate they became. This committee noted some findings that were of concern along with data that posed additional questions. For example, the 2005-2006 MEC enrollment numbers of 2,571 is too high in comparison to the actual enrollment numbers of 2,505. Also, for 2006-2007, the MEC projected population for kindergarten of 249 students appears higher than current school administration projections of 200 students, thus resulting in a faulty projected population for next year.¹ While the MEC study does indicate a significant increase of school aged children, this committee attempted to use this only as a guideline for our recommendations. It is the recommendation of this committee that before any new school building proposal is made an updated long range enrollment study is completed.

After a great deal of further data was collected, this committee began to interpret the findings. First and foremost, we prioritized the educational needs of the student, the impact on the family, the impact on the faculty, the financial impact on the community, and the practical implementation of a concept, respectively. It became increasingly clear that our two elementary schools are approaching capacity. This is further compounded by the increased building of housing, and potential new students entering the district. Furthermore, there is currently a disparity in class size between the two elementary schools. As with any multi-faceted dilemma, there is not one cure-all option. It is our goal

¹ *Long Range Enrollment Projections* by Merrimack Education Center, January 6, 2006, Pg. 17

to provide the School Committee with several concepts for consideration. We structured these concepts in short-term and long-term options. The recommendations that will follow in this report are such that no one piece of data will necessarily change the eventual path that is being recommended.

Short-term Options:

- ***Redraw the district line to balance class size at each of the elementary schools.***

Current enrollments and proposed new housing developments currently under construction will cause CES to bear the weight of more students since the majority of the new building is within the CES district. While this is considered a short-term option, it also has many long-term implications that will require careful planning and the adoption of a class size policy as described later in this report. It is significant to note that students from some of the new developments have impacted enrollment at CES.

Options Regarding the District Line

- Have a shuttle service between CES and AES in order to balance class size. The shuttle service would start at CES and transport students to AES from the CES district. Students from CES would ride their regular bus to CES and then take the shuttle to AES. Students would be allowed to transfer to AES from CES in order to balance class sizes. All new families entering the Amesbury Public Schools would be assigned to the elementary school with space available. The expectation is that once assigned, a student would remain at that elementary school until moving on to the middle school. CHOICE students would be placed based on available seats; however Amesbury resident students would receive preference for any school assignments.
- Have AES pick up more students from either the downtown area or the area south of Elm St. that includes a new development (Oak St.) on the north side of the river. The above option allows for flexibility of numbers when it comes to enrollment at each school. By looking at the projected kindergarten population in the downtown area, future class sizes could also be balanced more equitably.
- Have each elementary school be assigned new developments as they become occupied. Any new families coming from the Oak Street development could be assigned to AES. In this way, each school could balance numbers for future projected enrollments.
- Have the district line remain “as is”. If the present district line is maintained, students from each side of Whitehall Rd. and Elm St. would attend either CES or AES, respectively. Choice students from other districts will be assigned to schools based on available seats. All students have an option of attending either school based on available seats however Amesbury resident students would receive preference for school assignments. In addition these families would be required to provide their own transportation. Families already attending a school outside of their district would be allowed to remain in their current school assignment. This option only resolves class size issues affected by school choice enrollments.

Long-term Options:

- *Renovation of AES with the potential of an expansion*

AES is very dated, and at the very least must be renovated and brought to current building code and educational standards. However, it is a well established, town-owned site. This could be a costly project, but may prove more cost-effective than building on a new site. The potential for adding another level to the existing building seems promising, but would probably require an engineering survey to determine this. Additionally, there is the potential for a two story structure which would have 12 classrooms where 6 ‘condo’ classrooms currently exist. **This committee highly recommends the formation of an AES task force to address facility needs and to begin the process for a renovation and building project at AES**

- *House the Pre-K and K population in a separate facility.*

Reconfiguring the elementary grades and housing the Pre-K and K together in a specialized facility would provide a much needed relief from the overcrowding of the current elementary schools while preserving the Grades 1, 2, 3 and 4 “elementary school” concept. After Kindergarten, the student movement from building to building would stabilize at every four years, i.e., elementary school = grades 1-4, middle school = grades 5-8, high school = grades 9-12. This option also has the potential to create a facility for an early childhood SPED program, as well as space within the elementary buildings for more SPED students, which would actually generate significant revenue for the district. This option would not alter existing transportation schedules or operating costs. This concept could be realized by acquiring a new site for a building, or using current town-owned land, perhaps even in and around CES, or acquiring an existing building within Amesbury.

Options considered non-viable:

- **Renovate available space in the basement at AMS to house another grade level.** It is our determination that this is not suitable space for an educational environment, nor is there enough square footage to provide for another grade level.
- **Reconfigure the grade structure with Pre-K, K, and Grade 1 at AES, and Grades 2, 3, and 4 at CES.** It is our determination that this concept is not a viable solution as it will not address the capacity issue at each school. Transportation is also a large factor, not only for the practicality of families with multi-grade children, but for the cost increase to transport students within a single geographical location to two different schools.
- **Restructure the entire district grade configuration with Pre-K, K at AES, grades 1, 2, 3, and 4 at AMS, grades 5, 6, and 7 at CES, grades 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 at AHS.** It is

our determination that this is not a viable solution due to the disruption of the entire district, and capacity levels of the current buildings.

Current enrollment and facility review for 2006-07

Recommendation: It is the finding of this committee that the facilities presently available are adequate to absorb a moderate growth in enrollment. The current buildings demonstrate the potential to absorb a student growth of 135 students in grades K-4. This committee recommends that the School Committee adopt enrollment and staffing policies for each school that support the following configurations.

How was the information evaluated?

This committee reviewed current enrollment data and facility use. The building principals presented current data regarding facility use and current enrollment data, per grade, per classroom. This committee determined the following **target** and **maximum** enrollment figures for 2006-07 using current, functional enrollment data as the target number and maximum use of classroom space in determining the number of students each classroom could accommodate:

AES

Grade	Target enrollment per class	Maximum enrollment per class	# of classes
Pre- K	15	15	4
K	18	20	4
1	20	22	4
2	22	25	4
3	22	25	4
4	22	25	4

CES

Pre- K	15	15	2
Pre-K*	10	11	1
K	18	20	5
1	20	22	5
2	22	25	5
3	22	25	4
4	22	25	4

*Intensive Needs Integrated Preschool

The current building use demonstrates the following **maximum** student capacity for each building:

AES – 572 **Max** enrollment K-4(468) + Pre-K(60) + 2 rooms @ 22 students each(44)

CES – 576 **Max** enrollment K-4 (535) + Pre-K (41) + no additional space available (0)

Current enrollment for each:

AES – 463 (Pre-K – 51, K-4 – 412)

CES – 541 (Pre-K – 41, K-4 – 500)

Facility Review

The configuration of classes described above uses all available classroom space at CES for direct student services. Any additional classes would necessitate moving Art, Music, and/or Technology out of classroom space and creating mobile programs. This is not presented as an educationally sound alternative. At AES, this configuration leaves two classrooms available for direct student services that are currently used in 2005-06 as a first grade classroom and a literacy center. A potential number of 44 additional student seats were assigned to these two classrooms.

Enrollment Review

The number of classrooms for grades 3 and 4 presented for 2006-07 present an issue at CES in subsequent years if enrollment figures rise significantly higher than 100 per class. Given this data, it is evident that AES has the greater ability to absorb growth in student population in the lower grades. Therefore, enrollment policies regarding school choice and neighborhood school enrollment for new students should focus on the potential in the Amesbury Elementary School.

The concern of this committee is that continued increases in the kindergarten registrations at CES will result in continued disparities in class size and student/teacher ratios as students move through the five grades. Unless a shift in kindergarten enrollments can be obtained moving into the AES facility, CES will continue to exceed the maximum enrollments recommended and the disparities in services will continue.

Community Involvement

Recommendation: This committee recommends that following this presentation the School Committee schedule meetings on the information presented and options to be considered. The Amesbury community has experienced a significant amount of development and change in regard to facilities and enrollment in the past decade. A particular area of concern raised during the deliberations of this committee involved community participation at the School Committee level. This committee is committed to this process and will fully participate in any public presentation and discussion with the citizens of Amesbury. We feel the School Committee's participation in facilitating and engaging in this discussion is vital to the successful implementation of future programming in the school district.

Summary

In closing, this Facilities and Enrollment Study Committee acknowledges that there is a sizable discrepancy in student enrollment and classroom sizes. CES has both large classroom sizes and a higher population of 66 students, K through 4. Kindergarten enrollment is seven students higher at CES which is the equivalent of 1/3 of a classroom size. First grade enrollment is 27 students higher at CES which is the equivalent of a full classroom. Second Grade enrollment is 18 students higher at CES which is the equivalent of a full classroom. Third Grade enrollment is 13 students higher at CES which is equivalent to half a classroom. There are 14 classrooms at CES that on average have 3 to 6 more students, with the norm being 5 or 6 more than at AES.

Most importantly, the committee focused on the educational needs of students, the impact on the family, the impact on the faculty, the financial impact on the community, and lastly the practical implementation of a concept. This committee looked at short-term options, long-term options, and options considered non-viable.

Short-Term Options

- Redrawing the district line to balance class size at each of the Elementary schools
- Options regarding the district line

Long-Term Options

- Renovation of AES with the potential of an expansion
- House the Pre-K and K population in a separate facility

Options considered non-viable

- Renovate available space in the basement at AMS to house another grade level.
- Reconfigure the grade structure with Pre-K, K, and Grade 1 at AES, and Grades 2, 3, and 4 at CES.
- Restructure the entire district grade configuration with Pre-K, K at AES, grades 1, 2, 3, and 4 at AMS, grades 5, 6, and 7 at CES, grades 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 at AHS

We appreciate your support and confidence in the work of the Facilities and Enrollment Study Committee. We look forward to hearing the School Committee's response as we strive to offer each one of Amesbury's elementary school students equal educational opportunities.